



Understanding the Mental Health of Canadians Through Covid 19 and Beyond: Poll #19



Financial contribution from

Health
Canada

Santé
Canada



February 2024

Methodology

Methodology: This online survey was conducted among a sample of 3,224 adult Canadians. This was the nineteenth poll of this study (see below). Results between the polls are compared where applicable.

Weighting: National results have been weighted by the most current census data in terms of gender, age, & region to ensure the total sample is representative of the population as a whole.

National Poll #	Interview Dates	Number of Interviews	Margin of Error
1	April 22 to 28, 2020	1,803	±2.3%
2	August 21 to 31, 2020	4,010	±1.5%
3	October 22 to 28, 2020	2,004	±2.2%
4	December 10 to 18, 2020	2,761	±1.9%
5	February 1 to 8, 2021	3,005	±1.8%
6	April 20 to 28, 2021	4,005	±1.5%
7	June 7 to 13, 2021	4,010	±1.5%
8	August 17 to 24, 2021	3,010	±1.8%
9	October 22 to Nov 3, 2021	4,108	±1.5%
10	Dec 13 to 22, 2021	3,701	±1.6%

National Poll #	Interview Dates	Number of Interviews	Margin of Error
11	Feb 15 to 22, 2022	3,512	±1.7%
12	April 13 to 25, 2022	3,000	±1.8%
13	July 13 to 22, 2022	3,023	±1.8%
14	October 21 to Nov 1, 2022	3,500	±1.7%
15	Jan 23 to Feb 6, 2023	3,238	±1.7%
16	Apr 21 to May 3, 2023	3,494	±1.7%
17	July 27 to Aug 13, 2023	3,819	±1.6%
18	November 1 to 16, 2023	3,224	±1.7%
19	January 15 to 24, 2024	3,224	±1.7%

Poll 19	Number of Interviews	Margin of Error
British Columbia	420	±4.8%
Alberta	420	±4.8%
Prairies	329	±5.4%
Ontario	1094	±3.0%
Quebec	702	±3.7%
Atlantic Canada	259	±6.1%

Major Findings

- Results of Poll 19 demonstrate the **worst self-rated mental health indicators since the end of the pandemic** (Summer 2022), with more than one in ten Canadians reporting high self-rated anxiety (12%) or depression (11%).
 - High self-rated depression has increased by 3% since last poll (Fall 2023), primarily driven by increases in Alberta and Ontario.
 - While we expect winter months to impact mental health indicators, such a shift was not reported at this time last year (poll 15).
 - 80% of people reporting high self-rated anxiety or depression also indicated moderate-to-severe psychological distress on a measure of symptom severity (Kessler-10).
- Questions on screen time were introduced for the first time this poll, revealing a **significant correlation between a high amount of personal screen time and lower mental health indicators**.
 - Numbers are even more striking when it comes to younger Canadians (16-34) with high personal screen time (6+ hours per day). They are three times more likely than the national average to report high self-rated anxiety (28% vs 12% on average), to report severe symptoms of mental health distress (GAD-7 and PHQ-9; 15% and 14% vs 5%), or to show signs of cannabis dependency (18% vs 6%); and they are twice more likely to report high self-rated depression (22% vs 11%), to have had suicide ideations in the past year (34% vs 14%), or to show signs of alcohol dependency (12% vs 6%).
 - It is worth noting that one in four (26%) young Canadians spend 6 or more hours of their personal time on screens per day.
 - We have previously tracked the negative impact of daily news and social media on mental health. The negative impact of daily news has slightly decreased since the end of the pandemic (-3%), while the negative impact of social networks has worsened (+4%).

Major Findings

- Climate change is another new topic explored this poll. **Most Canadians (70%) are concerned about climate change, and one in three (34%) report that it has a negative impact on their mental health (5% say it has a strong negative impact).**
 - The groups most impacted by climate change are people from 2SLGBTQ+ communities, racialized people, younger Canadians, those with high self-rated anxiety or depression, or signs of alcohol or cannabis dependency. These are similar groups to those who show overall more negative mental health indicators.
- **More than one in four Canadians (27%) currently lives with chronic pain. The majority (61%) of them report that it has a daily impact on their lives.**
 - Not only older people but also a significant number of younger Canadians report that chronic pain has a daily impact on their lives. Other groups include those living in rural areas and those reporting high anxiety or depression.
 - For pain management, most people use over the counter medications (54%), self-directed (36%) or professional (28%) non-pharmacological therapies and prescribed non-opioid medication (28%). Most costs for therapies are covered by benefits.
 - People earning less than \$30K a year are more likely to rely on opioid pain medications (21%), compared to those with moderate to high incomes (all other incomes are consistent at 9 to 10%).
- **Half of Canadians (46%) report having already heard of the new 988 crisis suicide helpline, and 3% having used it.**

Canadians are reporting the worst mental health indicators since the end of the pandemic

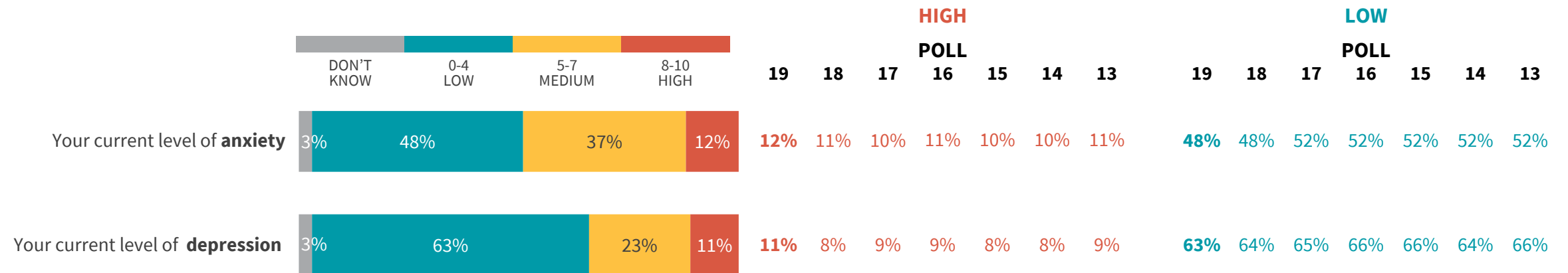
- One in ten Canadians (12%) report experiencing high anxiety, which has remained consistent since summer 2022 and is still higher than before COVID-19.
- The number of Canadians rating their depression as high has increased by 3 points this poll to reach 11%. It is the highest level recorded since the end of the pandemic.

Most likely to experience high anxiety:

- Ages 18-34 (16%)
- People with children under 9 (16%)
- Currently experiencing chronic pain (16%)
- High personal time on screens (17%)
- 2SLGBTQ+ (17%)
- Underemployed (18%)
- Physical impairment (20%)
- Financial trouble (33%)
- Cannabis dependency (33%)
- Alcohol dependency (36%)

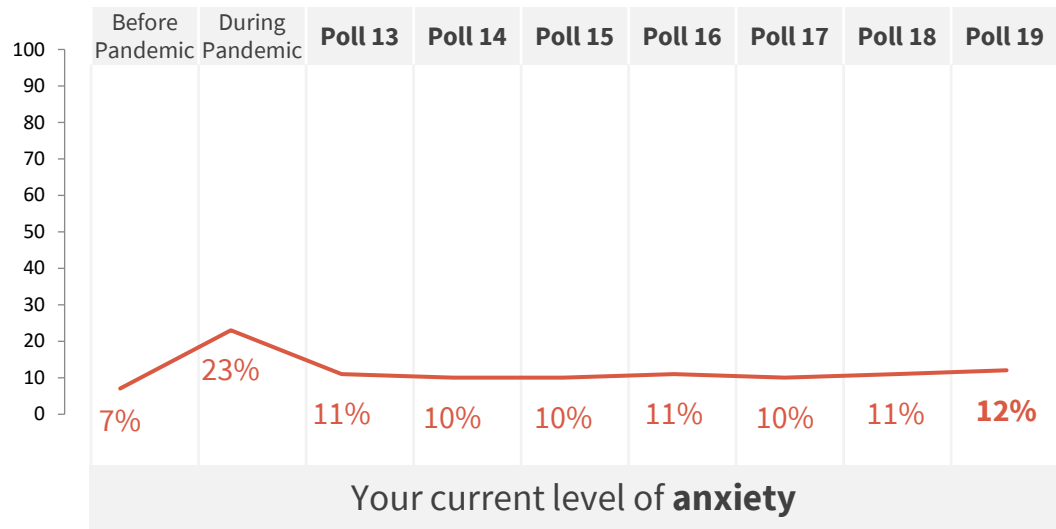
Most likely to experience high depression:

- Ages 18-34 (16%)
- People with children under 9 (16%)
- Currently experiencing chronic pain (16%)
- High personal time on screens (16%)
- 2SLGBTQ+ (20%)
- Underemployed (21%)
- Physical impairment (21%)
- Cannabis dependency (36%)
- Alcohol dependency (37%)
- Financial trouble (38%)

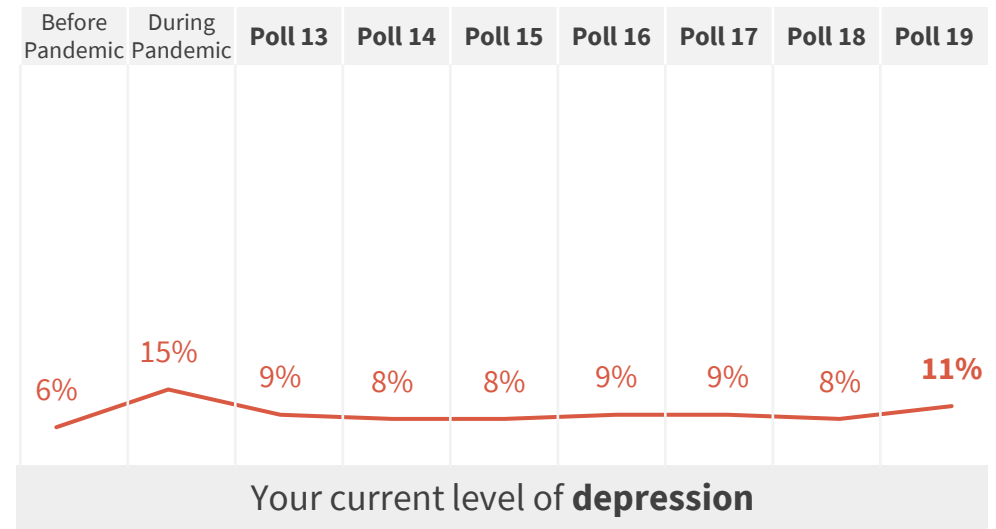


A2A. Please rate each of the following using the scale 0-10 where “10” is Extremely high and “0” is None. Base: (Total n= 3,224)

Canadians are reporting the worst mental health indicators since the end of the pandemic



HIGH

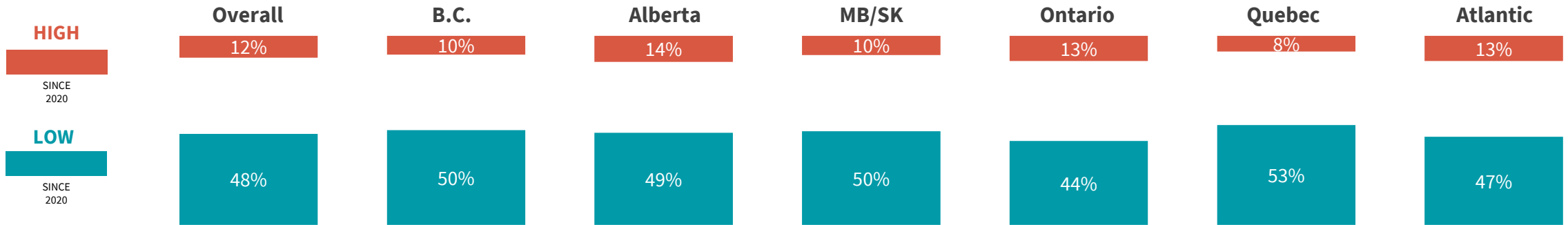


Polls 1-12 asked anxiety/depression levels since COVID.
Poll 13-19 asked current level of anxiety/depression.

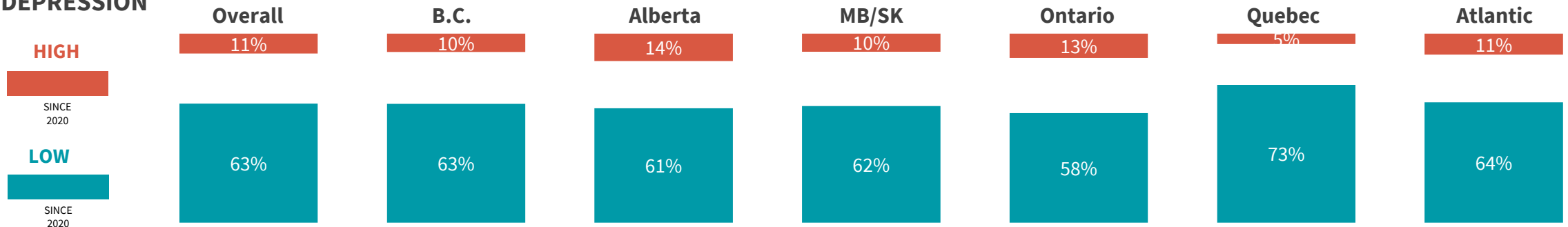
The rise in self-rated depression was most prominent in Alberta and Ontario.



ANXIETY



DEPRESSION



Polls 1-12 asked anxiety/depression levels since COVID.
Poll 13-19 asked current level of anxiety/depression.

A2A. Please rate each of the following using the scale 0-10 where “10” is Extremely high and “0” is None. Base: (Total n= 3,224)
(High = Net 8-10, Low = 0-4)

Moderate to severe mental health symptoms associated with high level of anxiety or depression has increased

- Based on the Kessler-10 clinical screener, four in five (80%) Canadians who rate their anxiety or depression as high are likely to have severe (58%) or moderate (22%) self-reported mental health symptoms, an increase of 5% since last poll.
- Among those who rate their anxiety or depression as moderate (5-7), four in ten are likely to have moderate (21%) to severe (22%) mental health symptoms. The likelihood of reporting moderate mental symptoms slightly increased this poll (+3%).

Psychological Distress 1-5 Point Scale Items (All/Most) (None/Little)

Tired out for no good reason	31%	31%
Nervous	28%	31%
That everything was an effort	28%	42%
Depressed	22%	48%
Restless or fidgety	20%	50%
Hopeless	19%	57%
Worthless	18%	60%
So sad that nothing could cheer you up	14%	63%
So restless you could not sit still	13%	68%
So nervous that nothing could calm you down	11%	67%

Moderate: 5-7

POLL
19
35%
21%
21%
22%

Mental Health Scores Among Canadians With High And Moderate Anxiety Or Depression Since 2020

High: 8-10

POLL								
19	18	17	16	15	14	13		
10%	12%	11%	12%	11%	12%	12%	Likely to have no mental health symptoms (<20)	
11%	13%	15%	11%	14%	13%	13%	Likely to have a mild mental symptoms (20-24)	
22%	20%	19%	22%	24%	17%	21%	Likely to have moderate mental symptoms (25-29)	
58%	55%	55%	55%	52%	58%	54%	Likely to have severe mental symptoms (30-50)	


A2C. In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel...: Base: (Depression or anxiety since 2020 rated 5+ n= 1,717)

A2CT_1 and 2: Mental health score. Base: (Rated 8-10 n= 508; 5-7 n= 1,444)

Younger Canadians with high personal screen time have lower mental health indicators

	General average	6+ hours on Screens	Age (6+ hours personal screen time)		
			16-34	35-54	55+
Self Reported Anxiety					
High (8-10)	12%	17%	28%	20%	8%
Medium (5-7)	37%	39%	48%	44%	28%
Self Reported Depression					
High (8-10)	11%	16%	22%	18%	10%
Medium (5-7)	23%	25%	33%	26%	18%
GAD-7					
Severe Anxiety symptoms	5%	10%	15%	13%	3%
Moderate Anxiety symptoms	9%	12%	18%	13%	6%
PHQ-9					
Severe Depression symptoms	5%	10%	14%	12%	6%
Moderate/Severe Depression symptoms	7%	10%	13%	14%	5%
Moderate Depression symptoms	13%	16%	24%	17%	11%

- Mental health indicators are lower for individuals spending a high amount of personal on screens (6+ hours per day).
- Numbers are even more striking when it comes to younger Canadians (16-34) with high personal screen time.
- They are three times more likely than the national average to report high self-rated anxiety (28% vs 12% on average), or to show signs of mental health distress (GAD-7 and PHQ-9; 15% and 14% vs 5%).
- They are twice more likely to report high self-rated depression (22% vs 11%).

 Significantly higher than other groups

Younger Canadians with high personal screen time have lower mental health indicators

	General average	6+ hours on Screens Total	Age (6+ hours personal screen time)		
			16-34	35-54	55+
Alcohol and Cannabis use					
Alcohol dependency	6%	8%	12%	11%	3%
Cannabis dependency	6%	10%	18%	11%	2%
Suicide Ideation					
Suicide ideation in the past year	14%	21%	34%	21%	12%

- Younger Canadians with high personal screen time are more than twice as likely as the national average to have had suicide ideations in the past year (34% vs 14% on average).
- They are also twice as likely to show signs of alcohol dependency (12% vs 6%), and three times more likely to show signs of cannabis dependency (18% vs 6%).

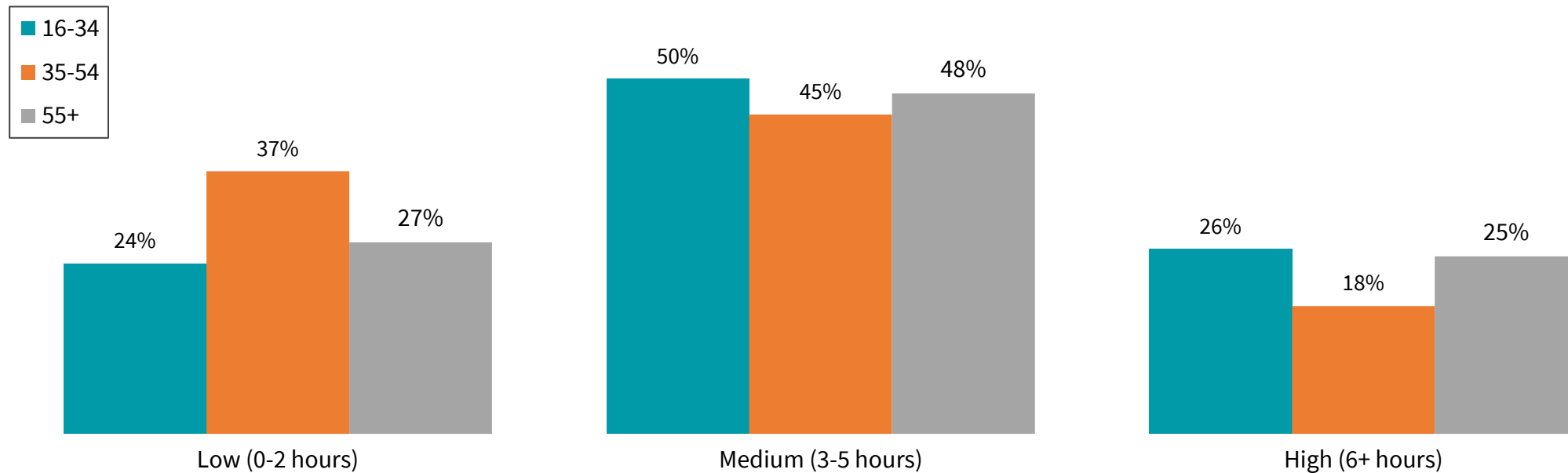


Significantly higher than other age category

One in four young Canadians spend 6 or more hours of their personal time on screens

- Almost half of all age groups spend 3 to 5 hours of their personal time each day on screens.
- One in four younger (16-34 26%) and older (55+ 25%) Canadians spend 6 or more hours of their personal time on screens.
- Canadians 35-54-years-old spend the least amount of their personal time on screens, with 37% spending two hours or less.

Personal Hours Spent on Screen Per Day



Daily News and Social Media continue to have a negative impact on mental health

- Two in five (39%) Canadians feel that daily news has a negative impact on their mental health. This is slightly lower than the findings during the pandemic (Poll 12 – Spring 2022), the last time this was asked.
- More than one in four (28%) Canadians feel that social media has a negative impact on their mental health. This is higher than the results found during the pandemic.

Negative Impact of Daily News:

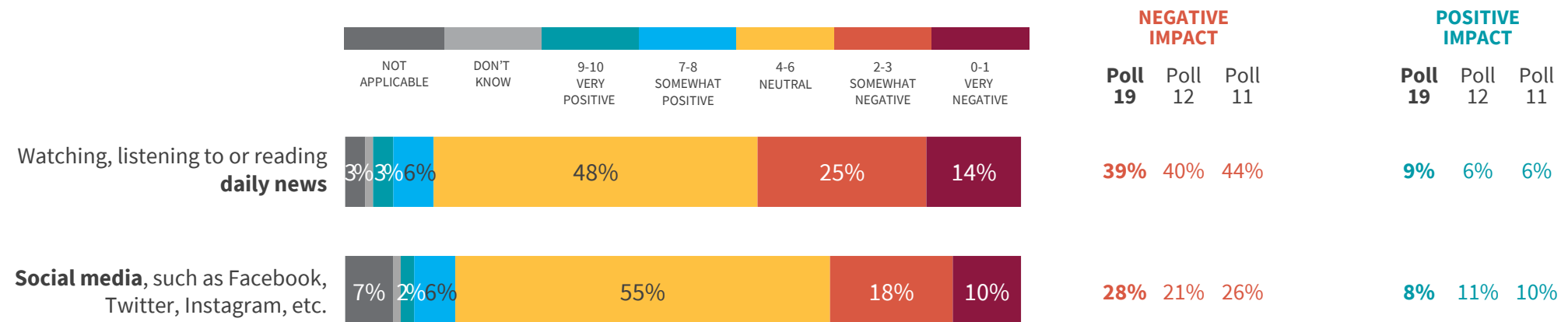
- Women (44%)
- Those who spend high work hours on screens (46%)
- Underemployed (47%)
- High self-rated depression (48%)
- High self-rated anxiety (53%)

Negative Impact of Social Media

- Ages 16-17 (32%)
- High self-rated anxiety (32%)
- People with children under 9 (34%)
- Ages 18-34 (35%)

- High self-rated depression (39%)
- Alcohol Dependency (44%)
- Cannabis Dependency (49%)

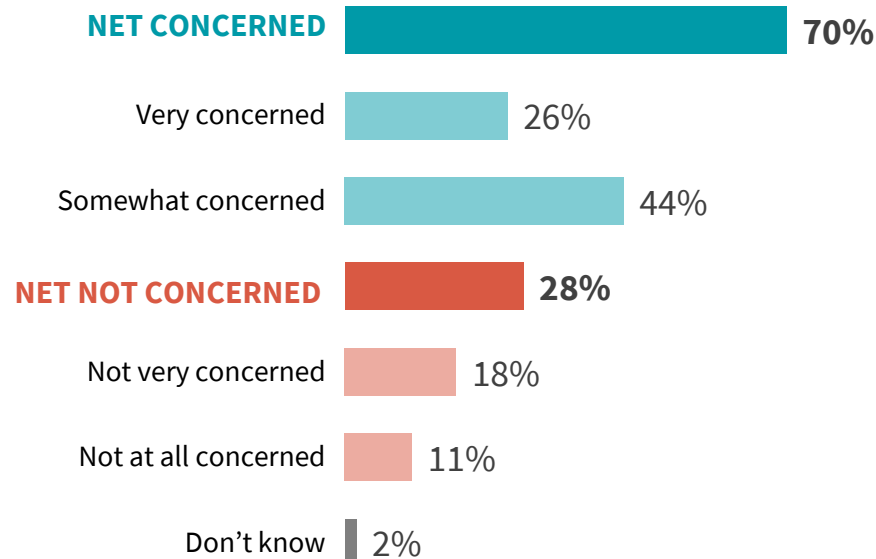
Impact on Mental Health



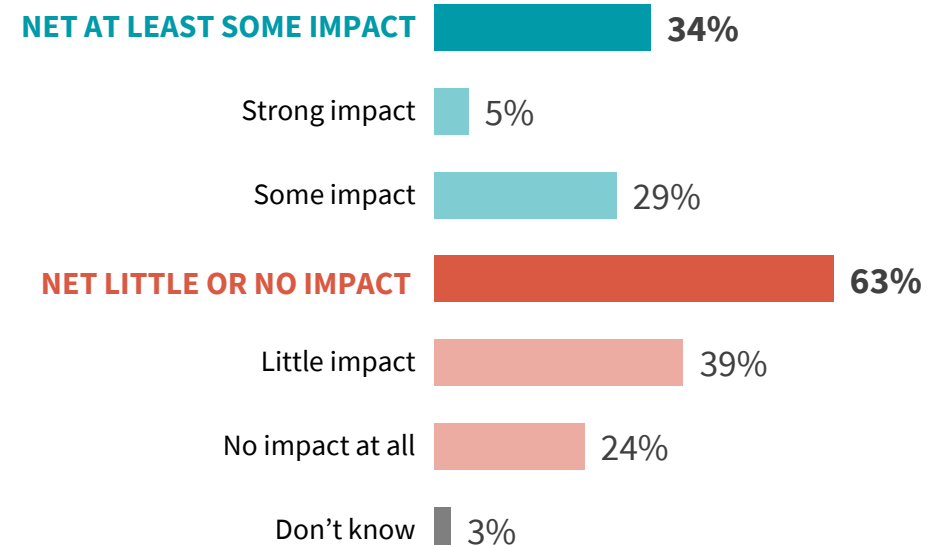
Most Canadians are concerned about climate change, for one in three it has an impact on their mental health

- Seven-in-ten Canadians (70%) are concerned about climate change, with 26% saying they are very concerned.
- Those in Ontario and BC (both 73%) are most concerned about climate change, as well as people living in urban areas (71%), younger Canadians (18-34 73%), women (74%), those with high self-rated anxiety (75%), a university degree (75%), and members of the 2SLGBTQ community (79%).
- One in three people (34%) say that it has some impact on their mental health, but only 5% report a strong impact.
- Those in Alberta and Manitoba (40% and 43%) are more impacted by it, as well as people with children under 9 (41%), people in the 2SLGBTQ+ communities (42%), racialized people (42%), those with high self-rated anxiety or depression (53% and 52%), or those showing signs of alcohol or cannabis dependency (57% and 56%).

CONCERN ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE



IMPACT ON OVERALL MENTAL HEALTH

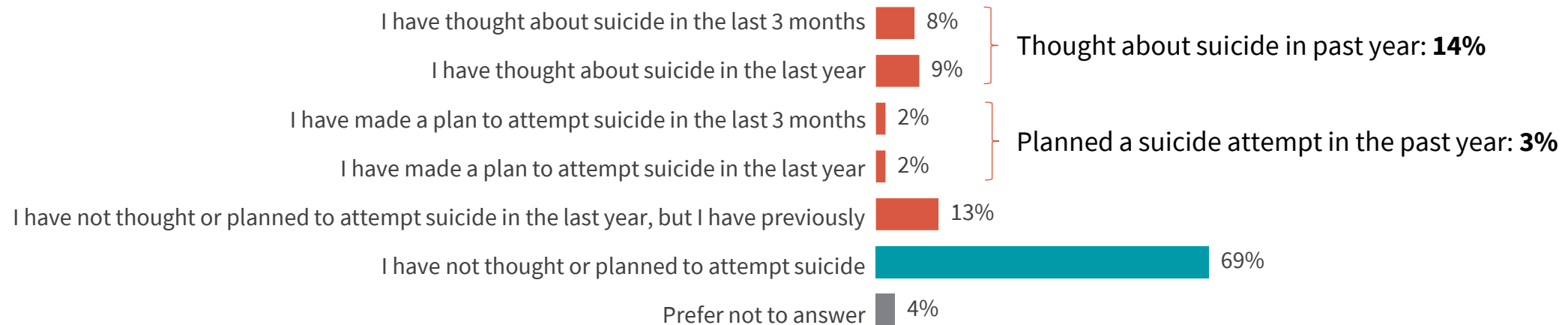


A26A. How concerned are you about climate change? Base: (Total n=3,224) **A26B.** What impact, if any, is your concern about climate change having on your overall mental health? Base: (Total n=2,862)

One-in-seven Canadians have thought about suicide in the past year, 3% have made plans

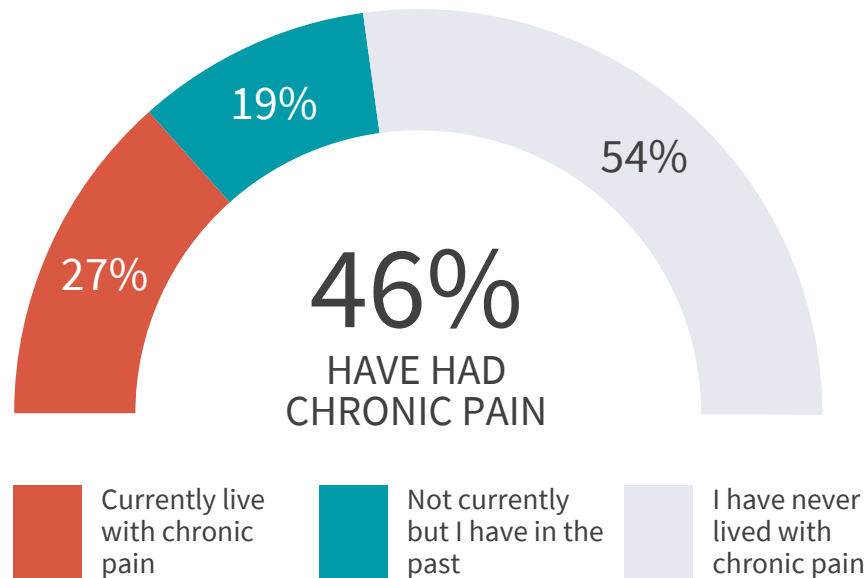
- Thoughts of suicide continue to be more predominant among those who spend a high amount of personal time on screens (21%), those who are experiencing chronic pain (22%), younger people (16-17 25%, 18-35 23%).
- In the 2SLGBTQ+ community, 36% have thought about suicide and 9% have made a plan in the past year.
- Financial instability is impacting suicide ideation, with those experiencing money problems being more likely to have consider it. Specifically, those who are unemployed (28%) or have gone into debt due to inflation (28%) or have financial troubles (39%) were more likely to have had suicidal thoughts in the past year.
- Those who rate their anxiety and depression as high have more thoughts of suicide. Among those who rate their depression as high, three-fifths (59%) have thought of suicide in the past year and one-fifth (19%) have planned an attempt. Of those rating their anxiety as high, 46% have thought about suicide in the past year and 18% have planned an attempt in the past year.

THOUGHTS RELATING TO SUICIDE

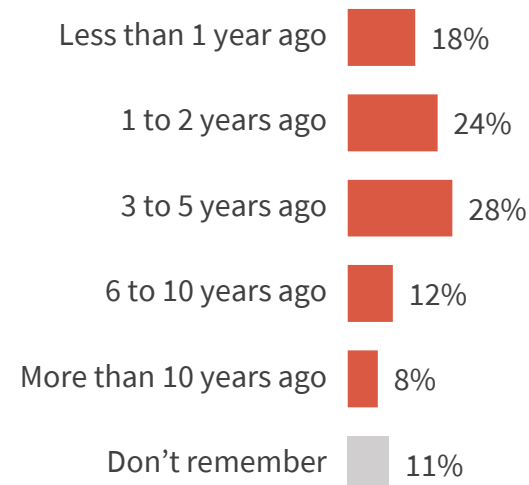


More than one in four Canadians is currently dealing with chronic pain

- Almost half (46%) of Canadians have had to deal with chronic pain, with 27% dealing with it currently and 19% having dealt with it in the past.
- While chronic pain is more common among older Canadians (35% are currently suffering), still 10% of 16–17-year-olds and 17% of 18-34- year-olds are currently suffering from chronic pain.
- Current chronic pain is also more common among people living in rural/small town settings (33%), those showing signs of cannabis dependency (38%), those reporting severe symptoms of mental health distress (40%), or rating their anxiety or depression as high (44% and 45%), or with financial troubles (49%). High personal screen time is also associated with chronic pain (34%).
- Among those who have dealt with chronic pain in the past, most say it was in the past 5 years (70%).



WHEN DID YOU LAST LIVE WITH CHRONIC PAIN



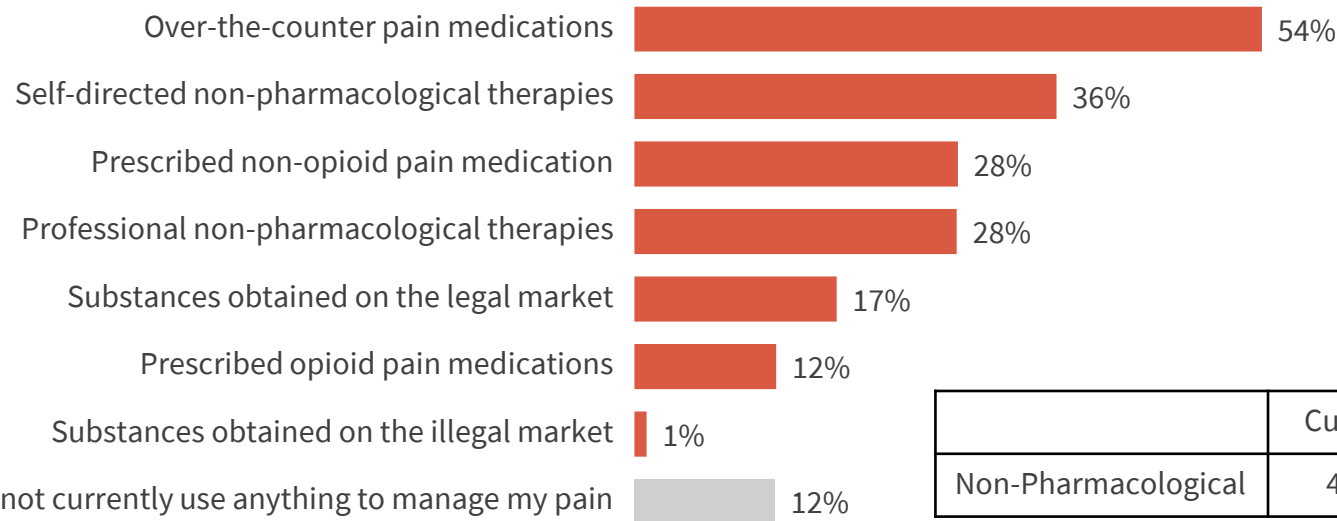
A1ONEW1: Chronic pain is defined as pain that persists or recurs for more than 3 months. Which of the following describes you best? Base: (Total n= 3,224)

A1ONEW3: When did you last live with chronic pain? Base: (Total n= 613)

People suffering from chronic pain are most likely to manage their care themselves

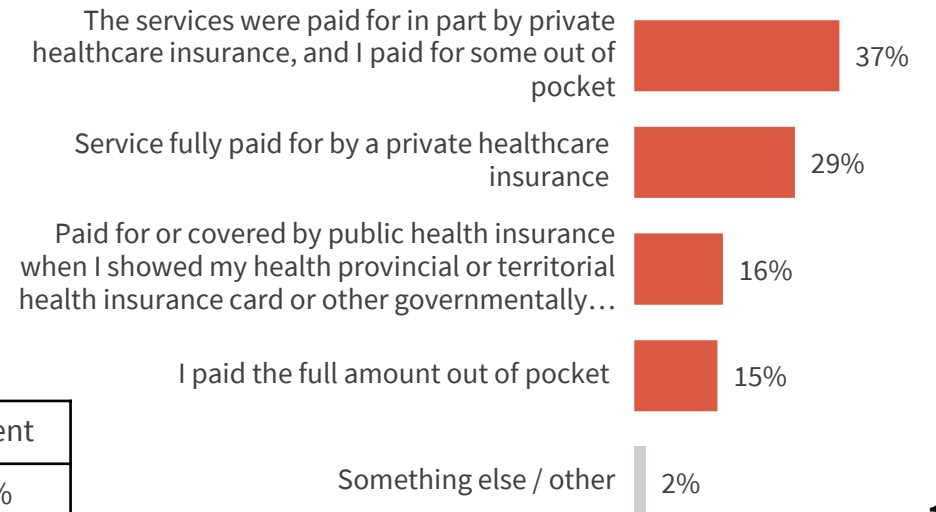
- Four in five (82%) people suffering from chronic reporting managing the pain themselves, primarily through over the counter (OTC) medications (54%), and self-directed non-pharmacological therapies (36%). By comparison, 40% rely on professionals to help them with pain management, primarily through professional non-pharmacological therapies (28%), and non-opioid prescriptions (28%).
- It is worth noting that 12% rely on opioid prescriptions for pain management. People earning less than \$30K a year are more likely to use opioid pain medications (21%), compared to those with moderate to high incomes (all other incomes are consistent at 9 to 10%).
- Two in three respondents depend on private insurance to pay for all (29%) or at least some (37%) of these therapies. This means that half of the people pay with their own finances for some (37%) or all (15%) of their therapies. Only 16% rely on government therapies.

STRATEGIES TO MANAGE CHRONIC PAIN – CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING



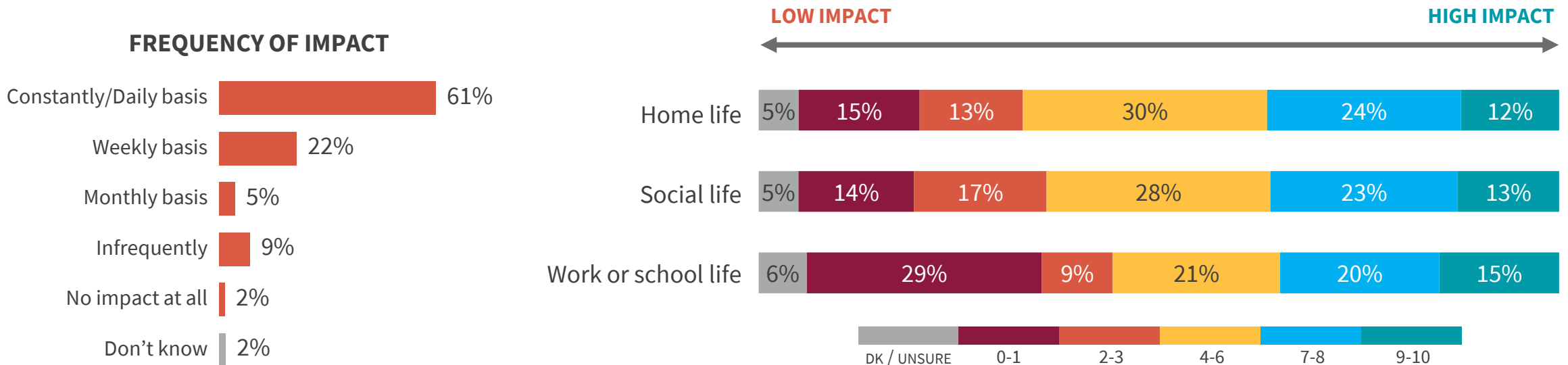
	Current
Non-Pharmacological	48%

HOW THERAPY IS FUNDED – CURRENTLY



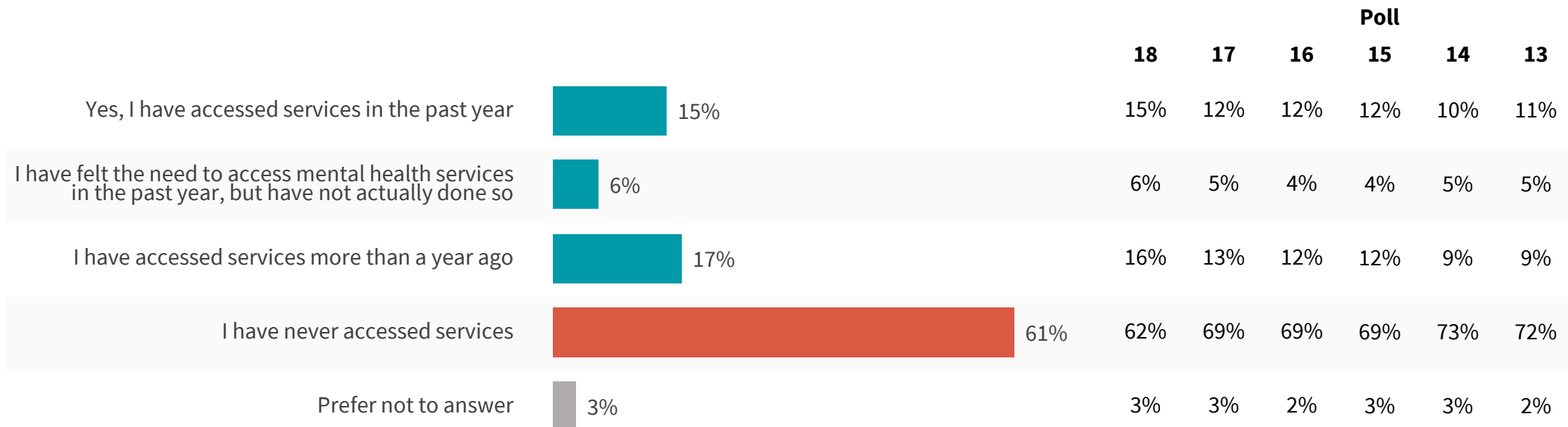
People suffering from chronic pain report that it has an impact on their daily life

- Four in five (83%) people who suffer from chronic pain say it impacts their lives at least weekly, with 61% say they deal with it everyday.
- While daily impact is most common among those 55 and older (65%), still more than half of younger people suffering from chronic pain are dealing with it every day (18-34 53%, 35-54 59%).
- People living in rural areas and small towns are more likely to suffer from chronic pain and to deal with it daily (70%), as are those with high self-rated anxiety or depression (73% for both), and those who spend a high amount of their personal time on screens (69%).
- One in three people suffering from chronic pain report that it has a high impact on all phases of their life: Home (36%), Social (36%) and Work/School (35%).



Access to mental health supports has remained consistent this poll

- After an increase in those accessing mental health supports last poll, levels have remained consistent this poll, with 15% having accessed these supports and 6% saying they needed to but didn't.
- Six-in-ten (61%, down by 11% since Poll 13 - Summer 2022) reported they never accessed any mental health services.
- **Those accessing supports in past year:** people currently experiencing chronic pain (20%), younger Canadians (18–34-year-olds: 22% , 35-54: 18%), frontline healthcare providers (26%), people showing signs of cannabis or alcohol dependency (29% and 30%), members of 2SLGBTQ+ community (33%), those with financial troubles (41%).
- Those living in urban/adjacent areas are more likely to have accessed services in the past year than those in rural/small town settings (16% vs. 12%).
- While those with a high self-rated anxiety or depression and those with severe mental health symptoms are more likely to have accesses services in the past year (35%, 39% and 36%), still the majority have not.

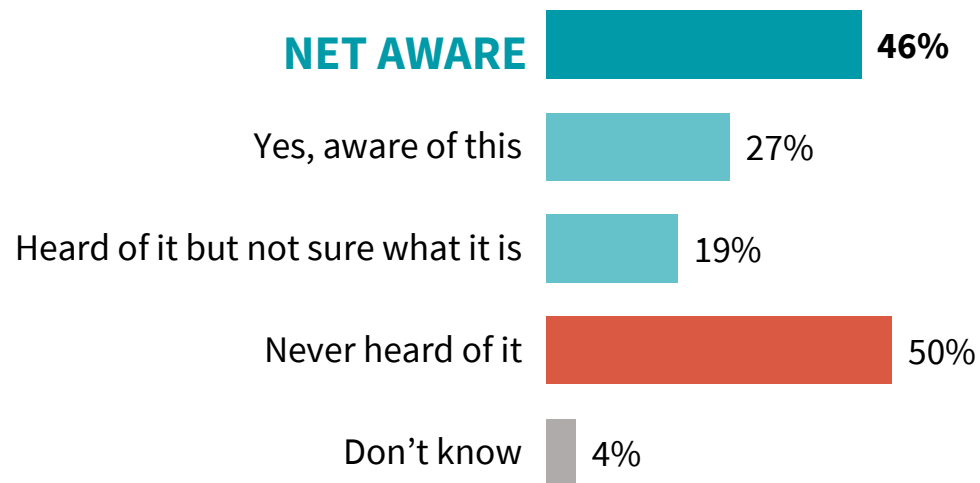


B15. Have you accessed any kind of mental health or substance use service or resource in the past year? Base: (Total n= 3,224)

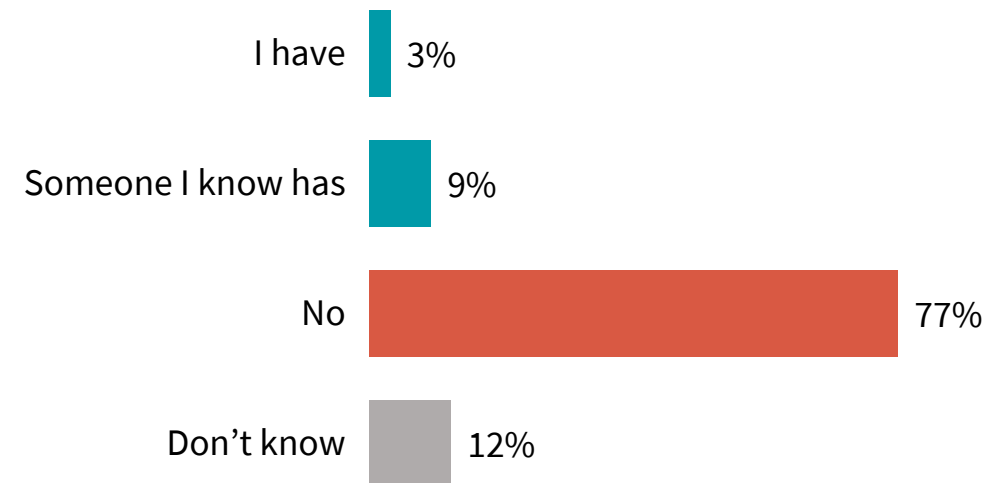
Half of Canadians are aware of the 988-crisis helpline

- Almost half (46%) say they are aware of the 988-crisis suicide helpline : 27% know what it is and 19% have just heard of it.
- Awareness is least prevalent in Quebec (38%) but is higher among younger Canadians (18-34 53%), those with moderate or severe (55% and 54%) mental symptoms, those in the 2SLGBTQ+ communities (57%) and those with signs of alcohol or cannabis dependency (62% and 71%).
- 3% have used the line themselves, and an additional 9% know someone who has.

AWARENESS OF 988 CRISIS SUICIDE HELPLINE



USAGE OF 988 CRISIS SUICIDE HELPLINE





Lesli Martin, Senior Vice President, Pollara

Michael Cooper, Vice President, MHRC

Claire Hlavacek, Co-Ordinator of Partnerships and Strategic initiatives

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